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Understanding the Impact of the \$100 Solution™ on Community Partnerships

Jami L. Warren, Sarah E. Kercksmar, and Allyson B. DeVito

Abstract

Service-learning has a variety of documented benefits for college students; however, less research exists on the influence of service-learning on community partners. This paper examines \$100 Solution™ student service-learning projects, a specific and innovative approach to service-learning, and their influence on community partners. Researchers in this study conducted qualitative interviews with eight community partners across the United States that were involved with \$100 Solution™ student service-learning projects within the past three years. Interviews were transcribed and coded for themes. Results provided insight into the community partners' perceived and tangible benefits of the students' projects, community partners' understanding of the five pillars, partners' motivation for involvement in the projects, and best practices and perceived barriers to successful partnerships. Limitations and directions for future research are also discussed.

Service-learning is common in undergraduate education. According to the National Survey of Student Engagement (n.d.), 59% of college seniors in 2020 reported having taken at least one service-learning course before graduation. Service-learning offers a variety of documented benefits for students. However, less research exists related to the effects of service-learning on community partners.

Here we focus on the \$100 Solution™, an innovative service-learning approach that helps students learn that problem-solving is possible with a limited amount of funding. The \$100 Solution™ began in 2006 as a seed of an idea among the Rotary Club of Prospect/Goshen in Prospect, Kentucky. This group recognized unmet needs in the global community and provided funding for students to address these needs in creative ways with just \$100. In 2007, students on a Semester at Sea program completed the first \$100 Solution™ projects and, upon their return, created the \$100 Solution™ organization out of a desire to expand the scope and reach of their work at sea. As of 2021, the organization has partnered with 15 educational institutions, including Western Kentucky University, the University of Kentucky, Arkansas Tech University, the University of Texas at El Paso, the University of Alabama, the University of Tennessee at Martin, Roosevelt University, and Trocaire College, among others. Over 300 student projects have been completed (The \$100 Solution™, n.d.).

Little research has investigated service-learning's influence on community partners, generally, or the \$100 Solution™, specifically. To

fill these gaps in the literature, this study had four aims:

1. Describe community partners' perceptions of the impact of the \$100 Solution™ student projects on themselves and their communities.
2. Examine whether and to what extent community partners and their communities experience the five pillars of the \$100 Solution™ projects, including partnership, reciprocity, sustainability, capacity building, and reflection.
3. Examine community partners' motivations for participating in \$100 Solution™ student projects.
4. Describe best practices for successful (and unsuccessful) \$100 Solution™ projects.

Background

Service-Learning Theory

Education theory supports the importance of service-learning, especially in today's educational context. Scholars suggest that today's college students (16–24 years old) learn differently than college students of previous generations did (Brown, 2018; Coomes & DeBard, 2004; Howe & Strauss, 2007; Landin, 2019; Nicholas, 2019; Taylor, 2010). For example, many students adopt a consumer and outcome orientation toward college and are intellectually disengaged from traditional lecture-based courses. Some scholars have argued that the lecture format often used in undergraduate education does not produce optimal student learning (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Guskin,

1994; Nicholas, 2019; Taylor, 2010). Instead, an active model of learning—one that encourages students to engage in hands-on activities that apply the course concepts—can increase student engagement in the classroom (Brown, 2018; Coomes & DeBard, 2004; Howe & Strauss, 2007; Nicholas, 2019; Taylor, 2010). Experiential learning (problem-based learning, service-learning, etc.) is just one approach to active learning.

Experiential learning strategies that connect course content to the “real world” have had documented success in the classroom. Dewey (1938) argued that traditional education does not provide students with the skill development they need to deal with potential present and future issues. Instead, he suggested that students need to be engaged in real-life, hands-on experiences in order to facilitate understanding of course concepts.

Kolb (1984) suggested further that student learning occurs most effectively in four stages: (a) concrete experience, (b) reflective observation, (c) abstract conceptualization, and (d) active experimentation. In other words, students will learn better when they can focus on factual material regarding a concept, contemplate stories and specific real-life examples that exemplify that concept, examine visual representations of the concept, and engage in activities that allow them to apply the concept. Although students can often engage in the first three of these stages in a traditional classroom, active experimentation is not always possible. Service-learning opportunities, and more specific approaches like the \$100 Solution™, help students participate in active experimentation in and out of the classroom. As expected, then, service-learning has a variety of documented benefits for students (Able et al., 2014; Astin & Sax, 1998; Collica-Cox, 2020; Einfeld & Collins, 2008; Flournoy, 2007; Gullicks, 2006; Lee et al., 2008; Pritzker et al., 2015; Simons & Cleary, 2006).

Benefits of Service-Learning to Students and Community Partners

Students benefit from service-learning courses in a variety of ways, including in their development of higher-order thinking, empathy, cultural awareness, and personal and interpersonal skills (Bloom, 2008; Borden, 2007; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Gullicks, 2006; Gutheil et al., 2006; Lundy, 2007). In addition, service-learning approaches often motivate students to engage in intellectual exchange and action regarding social issues, to study, to develop life skills, and to seek out opportunities for civic engagement (Able et al.,

2014; Astin & Sax, 1998; Collica-Cox, 2020; Einfeld & Collins, 2008; Flournoy, 2007; Gullicks, 2006; Lee et al., 2008; Pritzker et al., 2015; Simons & Cleary, 2006).

Research has also shown that service-learning improves student learning outcomes. In other words, students involved in service-learning courses typically perform significantly better on cognitive learning assessments, including exams and other assignments, than do students involved in the same courses without service-learning components (Novak et al., 2007; Nowell et al., 2020; Warren, 2012; Yorio & Ye, 2012). Although research on the \$100 Solution™ service-learning approach is limited, Abrahamson and Grabner-Hagen (2014) found that participating in \$100 Solution™ projects increased learning among their health administration students, consistent with the effects of other forms of service-learning. However, no studies evaluate the \$100 Solution™ pedagogy from a community partner perspective.

Service-learning partnerships are intended to be mutually beneficial for students and community partners. Community partners involved in student service-learning projects often provide valuable help to students and their course instructors by meeting with students, assisting them with their projects, and even evaluating students. However, researchers do not know much about the influence of student projects on partner organizations or about best practices for successful service-learning projects. Recent research has indicated that student service-learning projects do provide needed and valuable services to their partner organizations (Steimel, 2013), but they can also add to community partners' workload by requiring additional resources and time. Partners have even expressed that it is not always clear what the role of the community partner is or should be in student projects (Kimme Hea & Shah, 2016).

In light of these findings, it is important for researchers and service-learning practitioners to understand best practices for developing service-learning student projects from a community partner perspective. Research has shown that strong partnerships require planning, flexibility, clear communication with faculty, and student commitment (Karasik & Hafner, 2021; Kimme Hea & Shah, 2016). Factors such as organizational capacity/size and employee vision can also positively influence whether organizations benefit from their partnerships with students (Geller et al., 2016).

The History of the \$100 Solution™ Approach

The \$100 Solution™ approach to service-learning is centered on five pillars: partnership, reciprocity, sustainability, capacity building, and reflection. *Partnership* and *reciprocity* have to do with the intentional formation and maintenance of student-community relationships and aim to ensure mutual benefit to both parties. *Sustainability* and *capacity building* highlight the importance of working toward long-term solutions to identified challenges and empowering the community to address these challenges independently through skill building. Finally, *reflection* moves students from simply volunteering to analyzing their service-learning experiences and exploring what they have learned.

Partnerships are at the core of service-learning experiences and help sustain these projects from semester to semester or year to year. In the case of the \$100 Solution™ framework, partnerships are established between students and community organizations. As both parties collaborate on ideas, students learn about the community partner's motives, rules, and goals, and partners and students must cooperatively decide how they will work together and communicate throughout the project (Jacoby, 2003). Students have partnered with local nonprofit or community organizations that offer diverse programming — such as after-school tutoring programs, community gardens, and food kitchens — and that work with a variety of populations, including refugees and teenage mothers. The ideal type of partnership is one in which a community partner and a group of students begin a project that can be continued each time a new group of students returns to the organization.

Reciprocity is the practice of exchanging things with others for mutual benefit; in the case of the \$100 Solution™ framework, all parties must benefit from the service project. The reciprocity pillar emphasizes that it is human nature for people to want to give back (Jacoby, 2003). Just as students participating in the \$100 Solution™ may be giving to an individual or a community, the participating individual or community should likewise be giving back to the students. Reciprocity can be enacted in a number of ways: A material good may be exchanged for a service, or the student group may receive valuable experience, cultural knowledge, or educational growth in exchange for their service. The essential goal for students of any service-learning project is personal and educational development (Jacoby, 2003).

Sustainability refers to a program's capacity to endure and is a critical element of service-learning projects. In accordance with the sustainability pillar, programs seek long-term solutions with lasting impacts. Sustainability can be difficult to achieve because students might only work with an organization for a limited amount of time. With this in mind, it is important for students to develop a project that is sustainable by design (Jacoby, 2003). In one example of a sustainable project, students repaired an interactive trail at a park: They came together to fix broken elements of the trail and created new items that could endure harsh winter weather. This newly designed trail should last for many years to come, well past the completion of the project.

Capacity building helps community organizations and members develop and enhance their own abilities until they eventually no longer need help with the challenge the service-learning program is meant to address. Capacity building has been described as helping others to help themselves (Jacoby, 2003). In a project that exemplified capacity building, a group of students helped refugees study and prepare for their U.S. citizenship exam. The refugees mastered the material they needed to know for the test, and in turn, they were able to teach other refugees this information after the students finished their time with the organization.

Finally, reflection is the practice of documenting, articulating, and reviewing the learning process and the progression of individual learning. It involves thinking back on an event and considering its meaning, a process that often results in realization and revelation. The practice of reflection asks service-learning students to answer the following questions: What did I learn? How do I feel? How can I use this in my future? Students can reflect in a variety of ways, including through class discussions, written assignments, group blogs, podcasts, or presentations.

We, the authors of the current study, have been involved with service-learning in various capacities for the past 12 years and have implemented service-learning in many of our courses. We appreciate the \$100 Solution™'s unique approach to service-learning and began implementing it in our courses about 5 years ago. Although the \$100 Solution™ has existed for 10 years, it has not been widely researched or evaluated. Thus, to facilitate research on the organization, its students, and community partners, the \$100

Solution™ organization created the Bill Sherman Research Foundation. We applied for and were awarded a small grant from this foundation to study community partners' perceptions of the \$100 Solution™. The current study was approved by our university's institutional review board.

Methods

Participants

First, a \$100 Solution™ board member compiled a list of student projects that had been completed over the last 3 years (2016–2019). The board member then generated and sent an invitation to participate in a research interview to contacts for each community partner ($n = 30$). The invited participants represented organizations that had worked with a variety of universities in the United States, including regional, research-intensive, and liberal arts universities, on \$100 Solution™ student projects. Ten community partners responded to the interview request, but two were removed from the sample because they did not meet the inclusion criterion for the study (i.e., having participated in a \$100 Solution™ project within the previous 3 years). Thus, the final sample included eight community partners. Seven were women, and one was a man. They served organizations such as the ones described in the Procedures section that follows.

Procedures

The \$100 Solution™ Board of Directors maintains a database of completed \$100 Solution™ projects and community partners. The \$100 Solution™ typically partners with nonprofit organizations such as museums, K–12 supplemental education programs, organizations dedicated to resolving food insecurity, organizations that work with adults and children with special needs, organizations that supply free housing for adults being treated for terminal illnesses, and so on. A member of the \$100 Solution™ board sent the initial recruitment emails, and a second recruitment email was sent 2 weeks after the first to those who did not respond to the initial request.

Once the willing community partners were identified as described above, we, the research team, contacted each participant via email to set up a virtual interview over Zoom. Interviews were conducted between September 2018 and February 2019, lasted approximately 30 minutes each, and were recorded for later transcription. Interview questions addressed the charity versus social justice models of service-learning, the five pillars

of the \$100 Solution™ and their application within each organization, tangible outcomes from student projects for the organization or community being served, and organizations' perceptions of best practices for successful student projects and community partnerships. Community partners were also asked about any barriers related to facilitating successful student projects and community partnerships.

The Zoom interviews ($n = 8$) were transcribed and cleaned to prepare for analysis. We created a codebook using an inductive model of analysis (Thomas, 2006). We chose one transcript for initial review, and each research team member independently coded this transcript for themes. We then met together to compare themes and create a codebook of the most commonly referenced concepts. Once the initial codebook was developed, we coded another transcript individually and then compared results with one another as a norming process to ensure that the codes were being applied in a consistent manner across coders.

Next, we individually coded each interview transcript ($n = 8$) until theme saturation was reached. The codebook was treated as a living document and additional codes were added as the analysis process progressed. We then met to review the transcripts for consistency and to discuss the overarching themes that emerged. We describe these results below.

Results

Perceived and Tangible Benefits of \$100 Solution™ Projects

Community partners described a number of perceived and tangible benefits that they received from the \$100 Solution™ student projects, including a new sign for their organization, the creation of a fall festival, more people to staff volunteer hours, and increased capacity. Many other benefits are mentioned in the sections that follow.

Community Garden. To provide a more complete picture of the benefits that one organization gained from a \$100 Solution™ project, we discuss a representative example here. Community Garden (name disguised for anonymity), the longest running \$100 Solution™ project in the nation, is a community garden for adults with special needs. Participants in the garden's programming learn about all aspects of gardening, from planting to weeding to harvesting. After the garden's crops are harvested, participants take them to the farmer's market, where they learn how to sell items and handle money. In addition to

these tangible benefits for participants, participants are also able to socialize with the larger community and form friendship networks through the garden's programming. The partnership between Community Garden and its academic partner began in 2013.

The first group of \$100 Solution™ university students that worked with Community Garden initiated the "pumpkin fundraiser." The students promoted Community Garden with an end goal of gaining business support to increase funding for the organization. In conjunction with this awareness-raising effort, the students organized a pumpkin-decorating contest at the farmer's market that "helped individuals that didn't know as much about what [the organization] did, and then it helped raise money for the garden as well." This pumpkin fundraiser has been held several times, and the amount of money raised has grown from year to year. The first tangible purchase that resulted from the partnership was a large sign for the organization. As the community partner noted:

Not only has it raised money for us, but each year we find new businesses to bring in, and people didn't know about the garden, and it has brought new business to the farmer's market as well. . . . It has had a lasting effect.

This partnership demonstrates the broad impact that \$100 Solution™ projects can have on community partners.

Understanding of the \$100 Solution™ Pillars

The community partners' understanding of the \$100 Solution™ pillars varied by pillar type; in general, however, community partners demonstrated an overall lack of understanding of the pillars. Most partners both understood and observed the partnership and reciprocity pillars, though our interviewees did not demonstrate a clear understanding and/or observation of the sustainability and capacity building pillars. Community partners seemingly understood, but did not witness, reflection. The next several sections include representative comments related to each pillar.

Partnership. Community partners readily observed the partnership pillar. For example, one community member noted:

You know, I think they really became partners with us, not only from their work on the snack drive but the hours they

spent volunteering for the organization. They really got a good feel for what the organization does and how it impacts the girls and it really kind of made them feel like they were partners with us.

Similarly, another community partner described how students became part of their organization's mission. Specifically, when discussing the pillar of partnership, she stated:

Particularly, the fall festival kind of comes to mind. The students actually came, met with me, they wanted ideas for what would work best for our guests. They didn't want to just do something random, and so I gave them a whole bunch of options, and they latched onto the fall festival, and then they really worked together and with me to create this event.... What I love about your partnership with the \$100 Solution is they really do come in and they do become a part of what our mission is, and that is ... I have seen that throughout the years, and I think this program just blends it more dynamically I guess.

In this example, the community partner felt that the \$100 Solution™ engaged students in partnership more than other service-learning projects do. Another community partner echoed the same sentiment, noting, "I think a lot of students are surprised at the museum and the things that it can offer and they get excited about coming back, so I think that the partnership has been great." As these quotes demonstrate, the community partners understood the partnership pillar fairly well, and they felt like students demonstrated it, too.

Reciprocity. Community partners also readily observed the \$100 Solution™ reciprocity pillar. It was clear from the community partners' perspective that both the partners and students gained something from their experiences. For example, one community partner observed the benefits that accrued to both sides. She explained:

They [students] learned skills. They enjoyed it. I think that the volunteers learn skills and got some satisfaction in working with the young people that we work with. We definitely benefited because we need people to help us serve those kids, and they did, and some of them are still coming back; in fact, we just offered one of them a job ... for the summer.

On other occasions, community partners hoped that students gained something from their experiences but were not always sure that they did. For example, one community partner explained:

It's really cool to see college students interact with this community. So I really hope that they got something out of it. Just seeing people who are different than them, who speak different languages, who don't know how to communicate through words that each other can understand, I really hope that they got something out of it. I know that the families who participated in the activities definitely got something out of it for sure. They were very thankful.

In sum, while partners observed reciprocity in some cases, in others they could only hope that reciprocity was occurring.

Sustainability. Service-learning projects that satisfy the sustainability pillar should lead to continued benefits for the community partner organization beyond the duration of the project itself. While community partners observed reciprocity in some cases, they observed sustainability much less often. For example, one community member indicated:

It is a bit of a challenge to kind of create sustainability just because we work a little bit differently than some other nonprofits. I would guess that the tie in there is maybe the longevity of students continuing on with their passion with it and that they have continued to come back and volunteer for now more than a year after they've come and done the \$100 solution ... that would be the sustainability.

Another community partner agreed that long-term sustainability was difficult to achieve with \$100 Solution™ students:

There was not a long-term sustainability. We initially helped with services for 30 days and then 6 weeks after that. So in terms of long-term sustainability with \$100, it's just not, you can't really do that much with this organization.

However, other community partners recognized sustainability in other ways. For example, one noted that a donut station created by students was so successful that they planned to do it again:

We do plan on doing another donut station at our 5K to sell the donuts to raise money. It was very successful for us, so we're going to do it again. We're going to get some volunteers and reach out and get some donations. It was very low overhead, so it was a great way for us to continue to build our scholarship fund. On a personal level, one of our students that was in the program has actually come back in the fall and is volunteering not with the program but just on her own. She's one of the assistant coaches for one of our teams this fall.

It was clear from discussions with community partners that it was difficult to achieve the sustainability pillar with student service-learning projects.

Capacity Building. Many community partners saw glimpses of capacity building in their organizations as a result of \$100 Solution™ student projects. For example, an interviewee from Community Garden noted:

That pumpkin fundraiser, it kind of extended beyond. The sign also, because that visibility, you know, every week I meet somebody who will say "I didn't know that's where you all were" or, "I saw your all's sign. You have a very distinctive logo." It's a tomato. It's very distinctive. That was one thing we did right was the logo, so to see that prominently displayed, we've gained a lot of visibility that way that is ongoing.

Another community partner echoed the same sentiment, stating, "I'm wanting the students hopefully from this semester to think outside of the box where we could create something that could create that capacity for a continued program or something along those lines." Statements like these from community partners show that it is difficult to measure capacity building in a short amount of time. While community partners felt they were moving toward capacity building, without following up, it is difficult to determine for certain.

Reflection. While community partners understood the pillar of reflection, they did not always observe it or initiate it in an intentional way among students. For instance, one community partner described observing informal reflection among students:

You get the students who come in and say something, they'll say well, "I remember my parents talking about this" or "I remember my grandmother telling me something about this," and some students that were just ... this is the first class they've had like this with history and collecting your family history and getting a taste of video or recording so you will always have, and I have had several, three or four students, who say, "Next time I go home, I am going to interview my grandmother," and I say, "Please do." That's some family information that they probably don't realize they have. I've had one student call me back who said they went home last weekend, and "I interviewed some aunts and uncles" and different things like that.

Another community member described an informal reflective conversation with students after an event:

I truly believe that the night of the fall festival, there was an immediate reciprocation on that this was a wonderful event, and we were able to chat about what they offered, and I think seeing that I actually came in for the event after work and did a Facebook plug, I think that there was just a genuine, overall ... and I emailed the facilitator of the group and just thanked them and said that it was a wonderful evening for them.

Finally, one interviewee from Community Garden did engage in intentional reflection with students during the semester. Students in this scenario were able to engage in perspective taking, which was important for their learning. The community member explained:

On average, we would meet four times a semester, so we would get their reflections, and I think a lot of it was a realization that they, when they graduated high school, they had plans, and I'm talking about the students in the \$100 Solution, whether it be, well these guys obviously are going to college, but going to college, getting a job, getting married, or whatever ... the individuals we have at the garden would love to have those plans, but a lot of times they're limited by being able to access

those possibilities, so I don't think a lot of people think about that, and I think that's one big thing that they learned is providing access to people of all abilities is important because not everybody can do it alone. That would be one thing that I think they've learned.

A cornerstone of service-learning is the integration of reflection and service-learning experiences with course content in a formal way. It seems like the formality of reflection was not present in most student-community interactions.

Community Partners' Motivation for Involvement With the \$100 Solution™

Many of the community partners interviewed for this study had participated in previous service-learning activities, but this study sought to examine their motivations for working with the \$100 Solution™ specifically. These motivations ranged from simply needing extra hands to wanting to engage with students in a more meaningful way than they had been able to in other service-learning opportunities. For example, one community member enjoyed engaging with students in a way that helped them solve problems:

So I think creating these plans and thinking about these plans, thinking, "I really want to give this event the best effort and put all of my heart into it, but what can we do feasibly? \$100 only goes so far. How do we create ..." It's really using strategy to create events with a lot of realism. So follow through and using those problem-solving skills to say, "I can't do this, I can't do this, but I can do this, this, and this." And that has ... I think the students that at first came with all of these great ideas, but we had to rethink, and we had to scale down, but we really didn't have to sacrifice anything that they had in mind, we just had to make changes.

Students often made seemingly difficult or challenging projects become possible. For instance, a community partner explained:

The building we bought had to be totally trashed and redone but when I was approached, I thought "Okay, maybe they can help." [laughter] And so you know, I gave them a room to see what they could do with it, and I was very pleased working

with that group. We even took a picture of them and have it on the door coming into this room. They painted murals on the wall, they helped design this room, so I mean it was just a matter of ... “Yeah, I really can use all the help I can get, and we’ll see what these kids can do.”

Finally, some community partners discussed the value in working with students that have an opportunity to make a real difference. For example, one community partner stated:

It’s more and more required now that students are required to do some sort of community service as part of their schooling, and I’ve seen many, many instances where it’s like, “OK, yes,” clicking a box, “I’m here, sign my sheet, I’m gone,” and so the opportunity for this, for students to have some insight, to have some opportunities to make some decisions as a group and then have a more sustainable impact from a longer term, I think it makes for a more powerful experience on both sides.

Many community partners had positive things to say about \$100 Solution™ students, but they also addressed barriers to successful partnerships with academic institutions.

Best Practices for and Barriers to Successful \$100 Solution™ Partnerships

One of the major aims of this study was to explore best practices for and barriers to successful \$100 Solution™ project partnerships. As noted in the Background section of this article, there is a lack of information generally about best practices and barriers to service-learning from the community partner perspective, and this study seeks to address that gap.

Best Practices. Clear communication and following through on commitments were big themes that came up during our discussions with community partners about best practices. For example, one community partner discussed the importance of communicating clearly ahead of time about all parties’ needs. She specifically said:

I think spending time, taking time, setting up time to make sure that we meet and talk about what our needs are, what your needs are, and how those can kind of come together. I think

sometimes we are both going down our own path, but we don’t take that time out and think about what is the best for both of our organizations.

Another community partner talked about the importance of involving her in early discussions about the project as well as communicating through various modes. For example, she explained:

They invited me to their group sessions to talk about their ideas and really involved me. We had a group text that they would shout out some ideas at, and they were able, I think they had a girl from [location X] who was connected with some resources ... so she kind of got the ball rolling with where in [location X] can we do A, B, and C. It was a lot of communication, a lot of knowledge that was already present, and that group was very, they were not shy. They were very on top of things and willing to communicate.

Finally, one community partner discussed the importance of students being present and following through on commitments. She stated:

You know it’s showing up and helping in a lot of cases. It’s just being very present ... It’s a very time-consuming thing, but it’s not about ... it’s time, putting in time, showing up when you’re needed where you’re needed, that kind of thing.

Barriers. While community partners had a lot to say about the importance of clear communication to successful partnerships, they also discussed barriers that impede successful partnerships. More specifically, community partners discussed the burdens on their time. For example, one community partner lamented her inability to connect with every student due to time constraints:

Just for me on my end, because we have such a large group of students that come in, it’s being able to connect with each student in some form or fashion. I may not be able to be as close with every student that comes in through this program, I do sometimes struggle because we sometimes have part-time staff facilitating their hours, so I sometimes feel out of the loop, so staying connected and being really ... hoping that they don’t feel like they’re being brushed under the table or being lost in the cracks.

Another community member talked about the burden of taking on student projects when communication was not always clear. She explained:

The \$100 Solution, I know you're trying to teach the kids something about how \$100 can make a difference, but in a way, when we're all busy, it ended up being a little bit more of a burden than a help only because they didn't know what to do, so they were talking to us, and we were trying to make it fit their parameters, and we had three of our highest-level staff people standing around trying to figure out what we're supposed to do.

Finally, community partners often discussed the challenge of finding common meeting times that fit everyone's schedule. For example, one community partner stated:

Finding that time that everyone could get together and meet was difficult. Not only meeting with the professor but meeting with the students as well. That was sort of a constraint that we had or a barrier we had, finding time for everyone to be there.

Understanding these best practices and barriers from a community partner perspective will add to the service-learning literature and contribute to improving future partnerships among academic and community partners.

Discussion

This study had four aims:

1. Describe community partners' perceptions of the impact of the \$100 Solution™ student projects on themselves and their communities.
2. Examine whether and to what extent community partners and their communities experience the five pillars of the \$100 Solution™ projects, including partnership, reciprocity, sustainability, capacity building, and reflection.
3. Examine community partners' motivations for participating in \$100 Solution™ student projects.
4. Describe best practices for successful (and unsuccessful) \$100 Solution™ projects.

The results of this study have important implications for those implementing or thinking of implementing the \$100 Solution™ in their courses.

In terms of best practices, previous work from Kimme Hea and Shah (2016) determined that planning and flexibility were essential best practices when working with community partners. Karasik and Hafner (2021) also discussed the importance of communication with community partners. The present study confirmed these factors (as described in the Results section).

First and most importantly, this study demonstrated the importance of training community partners on the intent of the course and the expectations for their involvement. Kimme Hea and Shah (2016) found that community partners did not always have a clear understanding of what their role in the students' projects was supposed to be, and the results of this study were similar. One surprising finding was that community partners did not understand the \$100 Solution™ pillars prior to the start of students' service-learning projects. As a result, it was difficult for community partners to facilitate the students' experiences in a way that was consistent with the \$100 Solution™ mission. The \$100 Solution™ organization needs to strengthen the training that community partners receive in terms of role clarification (for community partners, students, and academic partners), the understanding of the five pillars, and how the pillars should be implemented in students' service-learning projects. The five pillars are intended to guide these projects and are key to the \$100 Solution™ approach. Therefore, they should be made clear to community partners at the outset of their participation with \$100 Solution™ courses.

Community partners should also receive clear communication about the potential assistance and satisfaction they may gain from working with students in a \$100 Solution™ course. This is consistent with previous work by Steimel (2013), who found that service-learning students provided needed and valuable services in the eyes of community partner organizations. Community partners in this study seemed to collectively value students' contributions to their organizations, whether they were helping to plan festivals, assisting with fundraising, helping with paying for and developing an organization logo, and so on. It also appears that community partners benefit simply from watching students' growth and skill development, a result that extends previous findings in this area. For example, many community partners in this study spoke about how satisfying it was for them to engage with students in a meaningful way and to see the students continue to return and serve their organizations

into the future. Although this type of benefit moves beyond direct service to the organization, it seems that community partners also benefit from the satisfaction of participating in students' growth and achievement similar to how a teacher might.

However, it is also important to clearly communicate to community partners that \$100 Solution™ student projects can be burdensome. Community partners in this study referenced workload burdens similar to findings in Kimme Hea and Shah's (2016) work, including the additional time and resources required to work with service-learning students. For example, some organizations noted that it was difficult to coordinate time for students to visit the organization because their class schedules conflicted with the hours of the organization; staff members had to stay late or come in during nonworking hours to accommodate students. Also, if organizations have a small staff, it can be challenging to discuss aspects of the \$100 Solution™ project during a fairly short time frame.

In sum, the results of this study reinforce the importance of training for \$100 Solution™ community partners as well as communication about benefits and challenges associated with student projects. However, there were several limitations to this particular study. First, the sample size was small, with only eight participating community partners. Although the qualitative data gathered was rich, future study in this area should attempt to include a greater number of partners. In this case, the number of potential participants was small because this project was limited to those partners who had participated in the \$100 Solution™ and volunteered to participate in this study; future research could take a broader approach to recruiting participants. In light of our experiences with various types of service-learning, we believe the best practices gleaned from this study apply broadly to service-learning. Additionally, the community partners interviewed varied in terms of the amount of time they had been involved with the \$100 Solution™. Some had participated for years, while others had participated for a much shorter time. This may have influenced their knowledge about the \$100 Solution™ as well as how well the organizations worked with students and so on.

Directions for future research should try not only to broaden the scope of this study but also to develop and evaluate the effectiveness of service-learning trainings. Results from this study indicate that community partners did

not have a good understanding of the \$100 Solution™ mission or its pillars from the outset. It is particularly important that community partners have a good understanding of the service-learning approach being used so they can ensure that students' experiences are true to the program. This is the case for all types of service-learning. Community partners should understand the content of the course the students are taking as well as the project expectations for both the students and for them as partners. Doing so will ensure that everyone involved is on the same page. Developing training sessions, perhaps online training modules, could be a helpful strategy to engage community partners prior to their involvement in a service-learning course. Future research should focus on the development of community partner training sessions or modules as well as the evaluation of those sessions or modules (i.e., Were they helpful in increasing understanding of the approach? Did they make expectations clear?).

Conclusion

In summary, service-learning has clear benefits for students, while less is known about how service-learning affects the community partners involved in students' projects. This study sought to increase understanding of the impacts of students' service-learning projects on community partners, specifically examining the \$100 Solution™ approach. This is the only study that has evaluated the \$100 Solution™ as service-learning pedagogy from a community partner perspective. Because many institutions in the United States utilize the \$100 Solution™, it is important to evaluate it from both a student and community partner point of view. Results from this study confirmed previous work in this area but also extended work by noting new ways that service-learning benefits community partners and summarizing best practices when working with community partners. Avenues for future research were also described, notably including the development and evaluation of community partner training sessions or modules.

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